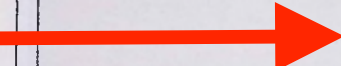


Grades 9-12 NTI Day #6 Forensics

Assignment: Please read the excerpt below as an independent reading assignment. Then read and answer the questions below the excerpt.

# Start Reading Here



## Physical Evidence and the Crime Scene

**physical evidence**  
Any object that can establish that a crime has or has not been committed or can link a crime and its victim or its perpetrator

As automobiles run on gasoline, crime laboratories “run” on **physical evidence**. Physical evidence encompasses any and all objects that can establish that a crime has or has not been committed or can link a crime and its victim or its perpetrator. But if physical evidence is to be used effectively to aid the investigator, its presence first must be recognized at the crime scene. If all the natural and commercial objects within a reasonable distance of a crime were gathered so that the scientist could uncover significant clues from them, the deluge of material would quickly immobilize the laboratory facility. Physical evidence achieves its optimum value in criminal investigations only when its collection is performed with a selectivity governed by the collector’s thorough knowledge of the crime laboratory’s techniques, capabilities, and limitations.

Forthcoming chapters discuss methods and techniques available to forensic scientists to evaluate physical evidence. Although current technology has given the crime laboratory capabilities far exceeding those of past decades, these advances are no excuse for complacency on the part of criminal investigators. Crime laboratories do not solve crimes; only a thorough and competent investigation conducted by professional police officers will enhance the chances for a successful criminal investigation. Forensic science is, and will continue to be, an important element of the total investigative process, but it is only one aspect of an endeavor that must be a team effort. The investigator who believes the crime laboratory to be a solution for carelessness or ineptness is in for a rude awakening.

Forensic science begins at the crime scene. If the investigator cannot recognize physical evidence or cannot properly preserve it for laboratory examination, no amount of sophisticated laboratory instrumentation or technical expertise can salvage the situation. The know-how for conducting a proper crime-scene search for physical evidence is within the grasp of any police department, regardless of its size. With proper training, police agencies can ensure competent performance at crime scenes. In many jurisdictions, police agencies have delegated this task to a specialized team of technicians. However, the techniques of crime-scene investigation are easy to master and certainly lie within the bounds of comprehension of the average police officer.

Not all crime scenes require retrieval of physical evidence, and limited resources and personnel have forced many police agencies to restrict their efforts in this area to crimes of a more serious nature. Once the commitment is made to process a crime site for physical evidence, however, certain fundamental practices must be followed.

### Securing the Crime Scene

The first officer to arrive at the scene of a crime is responsible for taking steps to preserve and protect the area to the greatest extent possible. The officer should not let their guard down; the scene should always be treated as though the crime were still occurring until it is proved otherwise. Arriving officers should immediately ascertain that the perpetrator is no longer in the immediate area of the crime scene and is not a threat to anyone at or near the crime scene. Special note should be taken of any vehicles or people leaving the scene. Of course, first priority should be given to obtaining medical assistance for individuals in need of it. If medical assistance is needed, the officer should direct medical workers to approach the body by an indirect route to minimize the possibility of disturbing evidence. This pathway should later be used by

investigative personnel for the same reason. The first responding officer must quickly evaluate the victim's condition before the victim is taken to a medical facility. The officer must also record any statements made by the victim and instruct the emergency medical personnel to record any statements the victim makes on the way to the hospital. This information should later be included in notes.

The officer should call for any backup or investigative personnel required and, as soon as possible, detain all potential suspects or witnesses still at the scene. The officer must identify all individuals at the scene, including bystanders and medical personnel. At the same time, the officer should exclude all unauthorized personnel from the scene. This includes family and friends of the victim, who should be shown as much compassion as possible.

The first responder(s) are responsible for establishing the boundaries of the scene to be protected. The boundaries should encompass the center of the scene where the crime occurred, any paths of entry or exit, and any areas where evidence may have been discarded or moved. For indoor scenes this may include anything from a single room to an entire house and yard. The center of the crime scene is usually apparent, and a sufficient area around this spot should be closed off. The boundaries of an outdoor crime scene are more difficult to determine and can span miles, especially if a vehicle is involved.

The officer should initially denote the boundaries of the scene using crime-scene tape, ropes, or traffic cones (see Figure 2-1). As additional officers arrive,



**FIGURE 2-1** The first investigators to arrive must secure the crime scene and establish the crime-scene perimeter. Courtesy Sirchie Finger Print Laboratories, Inc., Youngsville, N.C., [www.sirchie.com](http://www.sirchie.com)

investigators should immediately take measures to isolate the area around the taped-off section. Police barricades, along with the strategic positioning of guards, will prevent unauthorized access to the area. Only investigative personnel assigned to the scene should be admitted. The responding officers must keep an accurate log of who enters and exits the scene and the time at which they do so.

Sometimes the exclusion of unauthorized personnel proves more difficult than expected. Violent crimes are especially susceptible to attention from higher level police officials and members of the press, as well as by emotionally charged neighbors and curiosity seekers. Every individual who enters the scene has the potential to destroy physical evidence, even if by unintentional carelessness. To exercise proper control over the crime scene, the officer protecting it must have the authority to exclude everyone, including fellow police officers not directly involved in processing the site or in conducting the investigation. Seasoned criminal investigators are always prepared to relate horror stories about crime scenes where physical evidence was rendered totally valueless by hordes of people who trampled through the site. Securing and isolating the crime scene are critical steps in an investigation, the accomplishment of which is the mark of a trained and professional crime-scene investigative team.

It is worth noting that personnel should never do anything while at the crime scene—including smoking, eating, drinking, or littering—that might alter the scene. No aspects of the scene, including a body at a death scene, should be moved or disturbed unless they pose a serious threat to investigating officers or bystanders. This means that no one should open or close faucets or flush toilets at the scene. Also, officers should avoid altering temperature conditions at the scene by adjusting windows, doors, or the heat or air-conditioning.

**STOP reading here.**  
**Skip to questions**

## Multiple-Choice Questions

1. **What is the primary role of physical evidence in a crime scene investigation?**
    - a) To identify the motive of the crime
    - b) To link a crime and its victim or perpetrator
    - c) To ensure that police officers solve the crime
    - d) To determine the time of the crime
  2. **What is the first priority of the first officer arriving at a crime scene?**
    - a) To document evidence
    - b) To detain suspects
    - c) To obtain medical assistance for individuals in need
    - d) To call the crime lab for assistance
  3. **Which of the following is used to initially establish the boundaries of a crime scene?**
    - a) Barricades
    - b) Crime-scene tape, ropes, or traffic cones
    - c) Detailed photographs
    - d) Statements from witnesses
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## Short-Answer Question

**Why is it crucial for the first responding officer to secure and isolate the crime scene, and what potential problems can arise if this is not done properly?**

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